DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 448 498 EA 030 714

AUTHOR	Lumsden, Linda
TITLE	Early Intervention To Prevent Violence.
INSTITUTION	National Association of Elementary School Principals, Alexandria, VA.; ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, Eugene, OR.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Educational Research and Improvement (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE	2000-00-00
NOTE	5p.; Published four times a year.
CONTRACT	ED-99-CO-0011
AVAILABLE FROM	NAESP National Principals Resource Center, 1615 Duke Street, Alexandria, VA 22314-3483 ($2.50 prepaid; quantity discounts).
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022) -- ERIC Publications (071)
JOURNAL CIT	Research Roundup; v17 n1 Fall 2000
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Conflict Resolution; Crime Prevention; *Delinquency; Discipline Policy; Discipline Problems; *Early Intervention; Elementary Secondary Education; *High Risk Students; *Problem Solving; *Prosocial Behavior; Teacher Student Relationship; Thinking Skills
IDENTIFIERS	*Interpersonal Cognitive Problem Solving

ABSTRACT

This publication summarizes five works exploring the key role schools can play in dealing with emotionally disturbed students, in part because teachers are more reliable sources of information about troubled youths. The importance of interpersonal cognitive problem-solving (ICPS) skills is analyzed in "Preventing Violence the Problem Solving Way" (M. Shure). ICPS skills emphasize means-end, alternative-solution, and consequential thinking. Troubled youth tend to appear less developed in all these areas. Studies indicate these programs help children perceive ways of meeting their needs, enhance problem-solving, and improve academic performance. Using early detection, school intervention, and home intervention modules, the program explored in "First Step to Success: A Collaborative Home-School Intervention for Preventing Antisocial Behavior at the Point of School Entry" (H. Walker, B. Stiller, and A. Golly) reports persistent positive effects. In "A Schoolwide Approach to Student Discipline," (R. Horner, G. Sugai, and H. Horner) suggest schools should institute a limited set of expected behaviors, a distinct discipline system for violators, and individualized programs for nonresponsive children. "Making Schools Safe for All Students: Why Schools Need to Teach More Than the 3 R's" (A. Dodd) promotes the importance of care, concern, and connection in schools for creating a climate of respect. In "What Works in Youth Based Prevention" (D. Cornell), the potential of a wide variety of community-based, family-based, and school-based violence prevention strategies is explored. Schools that offer conflict-resolution courses emphasizing listening, creative solutions, peer mediation, and conflict management report fewer behavioral problems, particularly where applied schoolwide. (TEJ)

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Research roundup
NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS
VOLUME 17, NUMBER 1
FALL 2000

Early Intervention to Prevent Violence

Linda Lumsden

With most social problems it makes sense—both practically and financially—to be proactive and provide intervention at the earliest possible moment rather than waiting to respond until issues escalate or become more deeply entrenched. The problem of youth violence is no exception. If children who show early signs of antisocial behavior are provided with support and services at a young age, it may be possible to divert them from a course that will ultimately end in violence or delinquency.

Although schools should not be expected to shoulder the full weight of dealing with students who demonstrate evidence of emotional or behavioral disturbance, they do have a key role to play.

In fact, there is evidence that teachers of young children are able to predict with a high degree of accuracy which of their students will engage in delinquent behavior as they grow older. FBI agent Terry Royster notes that teachers, who observe and interact with students on a daily basis over an extended period of time, are more reliable sources of information about which students are most troubled and in need of help than are the numerous "warning sign" lists that have been crafted by a variety of organizations.

When teachers notice students who appear troubled and in need of help, how can schools respond in a way that meets the needs of both the students and the entire school community? The works reviewed here offer educators a sampling of possible avenues for intervention.

Myrna Shure discusses two early-intervention programs designed to teach problem-solving skills to young children.

Hill M. Walker, Bruce Stiller, and Annemieke Golly provide an overview of First Step, a program being used with young children who exhibit "soft" signs of antisocial behavior, such as aggression, bullying, and defiance.

Robert H. Horner, George Sugai, and Howard F. Horner approach violence prevention from the perspective of schoolwide discipline policy.

Anne Wescott Dodd emphasizes the necessity for schools to focus not only on the three R's, but to teach and model the three C's—care, concern, and connection.

Dewey G. Cornell offers an overview of a variety of research-validated community, family, and school-based violence-prevention approaches and programs.

Linda Lumsden is associate editor and writer for the ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management at the University of Oregon.

Shure, Myrna B. **"Preventing Violence the Problem-Solving Way."** *Juvenile Justice Bulletin* (April 1999): 12 pages. *Available from:* Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse, Publication Reprint/Feedback, P.O. Box 6000, Rockville, MD 20849-6000. 800-638-8736. Free.

Several studies over the past 20 years have found that delinquent and pre-delinquent adolescents tend to differ from their non-delinquent peers in terms of their interpersonal cognitive problem-solving (ICPS) skills. This finding is the foundation for two early-intervention programs which focus on changing students' thinking processes instead of their problematic behaviors.

I Can Problem Solve is designed for use in school settings with four- to eight-year-old children. Both this

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program and Raising a Thinking Child, a related program which trains parents to teach problem-solving skills to their children at home, have been recognized as exemplary juvenile delinquency prevention programs.

The ultimate goal of both programs is to prevent later, more serious behavioral problems and to help children "grow into thinking, feeling human beings who will be able to make good decisions when they reach adolescence and adulthood."

Specific ICPS skills emphasize means-end thinking, weighing pros and cons, alternative-solution thinking, and consequential thinking. Studies have found that students who are able to both think of alternative solutions and formulate means-ends plans tend to be rated high on prosocial behavior and low on impulsive or inhibited behavior.

On the other hand, children with less developed ICPS skills, in particular deficient means-ends thinking, are more likely to display "impulsive antisocial behaviors such as physical and verbal aggression, inability to delay gratification, overemotionality in the face of frustration, inability to make friends, and less tendency to show empathy or sympathy to others in distress." Deficiencies in two other ICPS skills—alternative-solution thinking and consequential thinking—are strongly associated with impulsiveness, withdrawn behavior, and lack of prosocial skills.

Both programs focus on helping children develop a habit of generating and evaluating multiple ways of getting their needs met, and there is evidence that the training improves their problem-solving abilities. Academic improvement, though not a stated objective of the programs, also tends to occur among children who receive the training at home and/or at school. A follow-up study found that the positive effects of the training are largely retained.

Walker, Hill M.; Stiller, Bruce; and Golly, Annemieke. **"First Step to Success: A Collaborative Home-School Intervention for Preventing Antisocial Behavior at the Point of School Entry."** *Young Exceptional Children* 1:2 (Winter 1998): 2-6. *Available from:* Institute on Violence and Destructive Behavior, University of Oregon, Eugene, OR 97403. 541-346-3592. $5.00. Web site: **darkwing.uoregon.edu/~ivdb/index.html**

If children show signs of antisocial behavior, the earlier an intervention can be initiated, the greater the likelihood they can learn more appropriate ways of responding to others and thereby be diverted from forming deeply embedded patterns of antisocial behavior.

One intervention program being used with young children who exhibit "soft" signs of antisocial behavior, such as aggression, bullying, and defiance, is called First Step to Success. The two- to three-month program strives to increase students' adaptive behavior and time engaged in teacher-assigned tasks, while decreasing aggressiveness and other forms of maladaptive behavior.

The program consists of three modules: early detection, school intervention, and home intervention. The early detection module employs a universal screening process that ranges from teacher nomination to the use of rank ordering, teacher ratings, and direct observations.

The school intervention component is based on a modified version of CLASS (Contingencies for Learning Academic and Social Skills). It initially involves a program consultant who works with the students; later the student's classroom teacher assumes responsibility for administering the school intervention program. The component provides behavioral feedback for the students and is tied to a point system that allows them access to special activities and privileges.

Finally, the program's home-intervention module, called homeBase, enlists the support of the child's parents, who receive instruction from the program consultant in six skills critical to school success: (1) communication and sharing at school; (2) cooperation; (3) limit-setting; (4) problem-solving; (5) friendship-making; and (6) developing confidence. Parents, after receiving training, teach their children these skills, provide them with opportunities for practicing them, and reward their children for using them.

Follow-up studies have shown positive effects, persisting for up to two years following a child's exposure to First Step.

Horner, Robert H.; Sugai, George; and Horner, Howard F. **"A Schoolwide Approach to Student Discipline."** *The School Administrator* 57:2 (February 2000): 20-23. *Available from:* AASA Distribution Center, P.O. Box 411, Annapolis Junction, MD 20701. 888-782-2272. $7.70 for complete issue.

Few would dispute that a goal of school leaders should be to reduce dangerous and disruptive behavior by students. According to Horner and colleagues, principals can take three steps to reduce such behavior.

First, schools should identify, define, teach, and support a small set of expected behaviors rather than presenting students with a laundry list of unacceptable behaviors. When the emphasis is on affirming desired student behavior instead of on what students are not supposed to do, a more positive tone is set for establishing and maintaining schoolwide discipline. Having a limited number of positively framed, overarching rules for conduct (*e.g.*, be respectful, be

responsible, be kind) can help students cultivate socially appropriate behavior.

Second, it is important for schools to develop a distinct discipline system to deal with students who consistently violate behavioral expectations. To increase adult supervision and monitoring of these students, some schools use check-in and check-out procedures. These procedures, which can be implemented with minimal staff time and commitment, have the potential to improve educational and social success among students at risk.

Finally, for the 1 to 7 percent of students with entrenched, high-intensity problem behaviors that have not responded to traditional intervention, the authors recommend individualized behavioral support based on a functional assessment of the student.

Horner and colleagues identify six faulty assumptions about school discipline that often entrap administrators: (1) Getting tough is enough; (2) focusing on the difficult cases; (3) looking for the quick fix; (4) finding one powerful trick; (5) believing someone else has the solution; and (6) believing more is better.

If administrators make schoolwide discipline a high priority and embrace practices that are research-validated, schools can do much to reach troubled children and youth, and perhaps prevent another school shooting.

About ERIC

The Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) is a national information system operated by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI). The ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, one of 16 such units in the system, was established at the University of Oregon in 1966.

This publication was prepared by the Clearinghouse with funding from OERI, U.S. Department of Education, under contract no. ED-99-CO-0011. No federal funds were used in the printing.

ERIC Clearinghouse on Educational Management, 5207 University of Oregon, Eugene, Oregon 97403-5207. Phone 800-438-8841
Web site: http://eric.uoregon.edu

Dodd, Anne Wescott. **"Making Schools Safe for All Students: Why Schools Need to Teach More Than the 3 R's."** *NASSP Bulletin* (March 2000): 24-31. *Available from:* National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1904 Association Drive, Reston, VA 20191. 703-860-0200. $15.00.

Driven by a desire to prevent violence in the nation's schools, many administrators have stepped up physical security in their buildings by installing metal detectors and video cameras, requiring students and staff to wear ID badges, or hiring police officers and security guards. Dodd questions whether adopting such practices will make schools safer.

The body of the article explores the concept of the schoolhome (as opposed to the schoolhouse) and the necessity for schools to focus not only on the 3 R's, but to teach and model the 3 C's—care, concern, and connection. A schoolhome is a place where all students feel valued and respected by both adults and peers, and they, in turn, value and respect those with whom and from whom they learn.

According to Dodd, teachers interested in creating a classroom climate characterized by respect and collaboration should do the following:

- Examine what they teach and what they ask students, from the students' perspective.
- Listen to students and give them opportunities to share their concerns.
- Give students choices and responsibilities within the class.
- Think in terms of collaborative problem-solving rather than punishment when responding to particularly challenging students.
- Find ways to connect learning to the world outside the classroom.
- Make student learning public and/or connected to the larger community in some way.

Dodd also notes that revising the curriculum "to be more interdisciplinary and inclusive of all cultures, races, and genders" can provide substance to schools' commitment to making all students feel welcome and valued. Students must be convinced that "I have value as a person, I can learn, and I have a future worth working for."

Acknowledging that none of these recommendations will eliminate the problem of youth violence, Dodd stresses that the difference between an ultimately successful at-risk youth and a less successful counterpart often is the presence of at least one caring adult. Not infrequently, that pivotal person is a teacher. Dodd suggests that if every faculty member were to adopt as a secret pal a student who is on the edge, the impact on both teachers' and students' lives, as well as their attitudes toward one another, would be substantial.

Cornell, Dewey G. **"What Works in Youth Violence Prevention."** In *Youth Violence Prevention in Virginia: A Needs Assessment*, edited by D. Cornell; A. Loper; Al Atkinson; and P. Sheras. *Available from:* Virginia Youth Violence Project, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA 22093-2495. 804-924.8929. Full text online at: **curry.edschool.virginia.edu/curry/centers/youthvio/subpages/current/special/truewhatworks.html**

This report describes a variety of community-based, family-based, and school-based violence-prevention strategies.

Three community-based prevention strategies are mentoring, supervised recreation, and community policing. The family-based strategies are

parent education, family therapy, and preschool programs. Conflict-resolution training, violence-prevention counseling, social-competence development, bullying-reduction efforts, and drug education are the featured school-based strategies.

Conflict-resolution training teaches students "to listen carefully and respectfully to another person's point of view, accept that there are meaningful differences, and develop creative, mutually satisfactory solutions." Peers may also be trained to help mediate disputes between students. There is evidence that peer mediation and other conflict-management strategies are effective, particularly when the programs are implemented on a schoolwide basis. Controlled-outcome studies found that students can learn to use conflict-resolution skills in both school and family settings. In the schools studied, behavioral problems declined and there were beneficial effects on student achievement.

Violence-prevention counseling programs, such as Coping Power, provide youth with constructive ways to manage their anger and resolve conflicts without fighting. These programs also strengthen students' decision-making skills. Considerable research indicates that such cognitive-behavioral approaches to violence prevention reduce aggressive behavior. Some studies have also found improved school attendance and grades, and lower substance-abuse rates, following implementation of such programs.

Although sometimes ignored, or passively accepted as the norm in some schools, bullying can be devastating for those being picked on and victimized by their peers. One prevention program, Bully-Proofing Your School, seeks to create and maintain a school environment that is both physically and psychologically safe. This program involves staff training, student instruction, intervention with bullies, and collaboration with victims and parents. While directed at lowering incidents between bullies and victims, anti-bullying programs often reduce vandalism, truancy, and fighting.

Efforts are also being made to provide social competence training for students identified as being at risk for emotional and behavioral problems. Programs such as I Can Problem Solve and the Primary Mental Health Prevention project teach recognition of others' feelings, brainstorming alternative ways of solving problems, and the consequences of choices.

Finally, drug-education programs that emphasize the interpersonal skills needed to resist negative peer pressure, as well as other programs that teach social-resistance skills, have been found effective in helping students steer clear of behavior that is destructive to themselves or others. □

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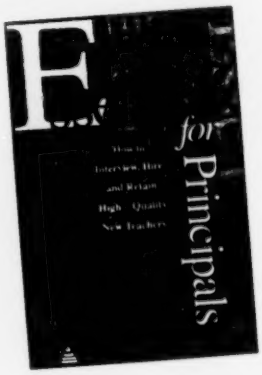
Essentials for Principals: How to Interview, Hire, and Retain High-Quality New Teachers

NAESP National Principals Resource Center



This is the first in a new series of publications published by NAESP in cooperation with the Educational Research Service and designed with the time-crunched working principal in mind. Each *Essentials for Principals* focuses on a critical issue, translating research-based information into a practical and user-friendly how-to guide. Planned to serve as a valuable desktop resource, *Essentials for Principals* provides optional strategies, step-by-step procedures, reproducible checklists, and useful tips that can help principals save time and make good decisions.

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